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SUBJECT: SERBIA: KOSOVO ANNIVERSARY MARKED WITH RHETORIC AND SNOW,  
NOT VIOLENCE

REF: BELGRADE 138

Summary  
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11. (SBU) The February 17 one-year anniversary of Kosovo's declaration of independence passed in Serbia without incident, although politicians of all persuasions used the opportunity to display their "patriotic" credentials as defenders of Serbia's sovereignty and territorial integrity. The visit of a group of mostly opposition parliamentarians and Minister for Kosovo Goran Bogdanovic to Zvecan in northern Kosovo yielded strong rhetoric but no violence. Demonstrations held in Novi Sad and Belgrade attracted limited attention and caused more traffic than political problems. Belgrade's biggest snow storm of the year may have also done its part to reduce numbers on the streets, and the financial crisis also likely played a role as the forces that fueled the destruction in February 2008 simply do not have the funds to turn people out in the streets. End Summary.

Lots of Barking but No Biting  
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12. (U) In the days preceding the anniversary, President Tadic and Foreign Minister Jeremic stressed in interviews and during public appearances that Serbia would not change its stance and would never recognize Kosovo's "illegal and unilateral declaration of independence." Tadic and Jeremic characterized Kosovo's independence as a "blatant attempt at secession" and a "direct violation of UNSCR 1244, the U.N. Charter, and the [OSCE] Helsinki Final Act," and pinned hopes on revisiting Kosovo's status on a favorable International Court of Justice (ICJ) opinion. Even Prime Minister Mirko Cvetkovic, who normally prefers to stick to economics and finance, felt obliged to issue a statement insisting that Serbia cannot tolerate formation of a "virtual state" on its territory.

13. (U) Unwilling to be upstaged by the government, a group of approximately 50-60 MPs from the opposition Serbian Radical Party (SRS), Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS), New Serbia (NS), and Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) and 15 members of the Parliamentary Committee on Kosovo traveled to Zvecan in northern Kosovo on February 17. The deputies attended a session of the parallel Assembly of the Union of Serb Municipalities in Kosovo in order to emphasize their view that Kosovo remains part of Serbia. Minister for Kosovo Bogdanovic and Democratic Party (DS) members of the Committee for Kosovo represented the ruling coalition at the event, which concluded with adoption of a resolution rejecting the government in Pristina and calling upon the Serbian Government to use the ICJ and the UN Security Council respectively to sue countries that recognized Kosovo and annul the deployment of EULEX.

14. (U) Ultranationalist organizations "1389" and "Obraz" organized the only noteworthy public protests on February 17. Several hundred protestors, mostly students, blocked traffic in Novi Sad in Vojvodina for three hours. However, the protestors focused more on

the controversy surrounding Vojvodina's autonomy (reftel), directing threats and insults toward Bojan Patric, Vojvodina Executive Board President, and Nenad Canak, head of the Vojvodina-based League of Social Democrats (LSV). Police reportedly arrested four protestors for verbally provoking the police, and the LSV called for hate speech charges against the demonstrators. In Belgrade, a couple of hundred "1389" supporters held a brief demonstration at downtown Trg Republike, which produced traffic snarls but little else.

Comment

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15. (SBU) The rhetoric with which the GOS greeted the February 17 anniversary of Kosovo's independence and the presence of Serbian MPs and Minister for Kosovo Bogdanovic in northern Kosovo were unhelpful. These actions contradict repeated GOS promises that referring Kosovo's independence to the ICJ would allow the government to "compartmentalize" Kosovo and turn its attention to EU integration. At least the weather cooperated for the anniversary event as Belgrade's biggest snowfall of the year kept some protesters home. The global financial crisis also may have contributed; somebody has to foot the bill to get people on the streets, but there is little appetite to spend increasingly scarce resources on rabbleroxing, even in the name of Kosovo. Although February 17, 2009 passed calmly, the February 21 anniversary of the attack on the Embassy, in which one protestor died, represents both another security challenge and another opportunity for the current government to distance itself from its predecessors. End Comment.

MUNTER